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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2453
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 3931
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 6989
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 9791
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ SEP QUITO 0705
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0866
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: COCALEROS USE CONGRESS TO PUSH PRO-COCA/ANTI-U.S.
MESSAGE

REF: A. LIMA 3677
[1](#)B. 05LIMA 4441
[1](#)C. 03LIMA 983

Sensitive But Unclassified, Please Handle Accordingly.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Pro-cocalero congressional representatives ranted about the benefits of coca and the costs of U.S. imperialism disguised as counternarcotics policy at a recent "Coca and Biodiversity" conference held in a Congressional annex. Cocalero leader Nelson Palomino also participated. The well-attended event highlighted that cocaleros now have a foothold in Congress, and are using coca as a banner for a larger anti-system, anti-U.S. message. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) On September 16 Poloff attended a "Coca and Biodiversity" conference (9/16), at the Congressional annex building in downtown Lima. Huanuco Congresswoman Yaneth Cajahuanca of the Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP) organized the event, which was co-sponsored by a natural medicine and nutrition organization and the Kuska Peru political group led by cocalero leader Nelson Palomino. Approximately 150 people of diverse age and gender filled the auditorium. A handful of people were chewing coca leaf -a rare sight in Lima.

[1](#)3. (U) Two themes dominated the discussion: the clear difference between coca producers and narcotraffickers (though 90 percent of coca production goes to narcotrafficking) and coca's historical, cultural, and nutritional value. Vendors selling "coca flour" and coca baked goods at the conference received much positive attention. (Note: The "flour" is a nutritional supplement to be mixed with water or milk that includes 9-10 healthy additives (e.g., soy, rice, whole wheat, etc.) in addition to coca. End Note.)

[1](#)4. (U) Ricardo Soberon, staffer for cocalero Congresswoman Nancy Obregon, said coca was Peru's biggest renewable natural resource, but was a "sequestered plant" made taboo by "a dark force" (the U.S.). Soberon told the crowd that the U.S. uses the drug war as a pretext for its presence in Peru to steal the country's natural resources. He added that the U.S. is "like an octopus with tentacles spreading misinformation in all the press," and that the GOP Ministries obey the orders of the U.S. Embassy. Soberon closed his diatribe with a commitment by Congresswoman Obregon to present new coca legislation recognizing coca's historical, traditional, and

cultural significance, regionalizing management of the licit market, and protecting coca producers and including them in a dialogue. His speech got strong applause. (Note: On September 19, Obregon and other pro-coca Congressmembers submitted a draft bill to declare coca and its traditional use as natural patrimony. End Note.)

¶5. (U) In a subsequent presentation, cocalero Congresswoman Yaneth Cajahuanca said she, like farmers in the field, chews coca because it energizes her and helps her work. She said farmers in her district have no alternative to coca for cash income and claimed fumigation had dried up coca crops in Huanuco.

¶6. (SBU) Radical cocalero leader Nelson Palomino closed out the event. His discourse reportedly united indigenous rights and pride with coca as a cultural element. Palomino was released from jail in June on parole after completing a third of his 10-year sentence for kidnapping, burglary, aggravated theft, public disturbance, and support of crime and coercion (Refs B, C). Since his release he has criticized the GOP's drug policies and formed a regional pro-coca political movement called "Kuska Peru" (Quechua for "Together for Peru.") Palomino's stature as a political leader has been strengthened through the cocalero dialogue with the government, meetings with senior GOP officials including President Garcia, and in conferences such as this.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: The conference highlights the emergence of a newly empowered leadership of pro-coca political leaders inside and outside of Congress. Some observers believe Palomino's and other cocalero leader's political stars are rising, enabled by the government's decisions to elevate them

to the status of valid interlocutors. These pro-coca leaders are attempting to shape the GOP's policy through the on-going government dialogue and legislative proposals. It further suggests the consolidation of the coca leaf, and its cultivation free from the interference of outside powers, as the banner of a larger anti-systemic, anti-U.S. political movement that now has a foothold in Congress. End Comment.
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